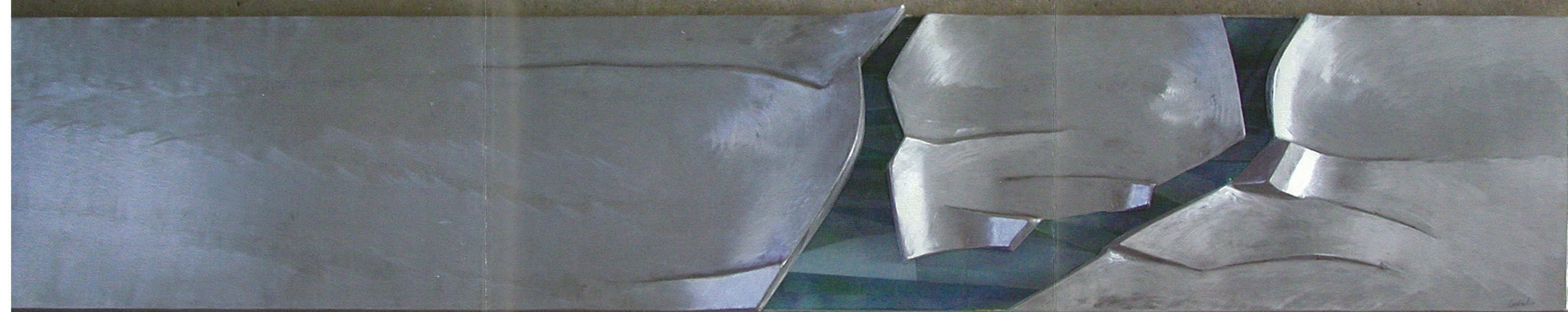



POLAR ILLUMINATIONS



PRODUCED IN CONJUNCTION WITH
EXHIBITION OF RECENT WORK
PORT ART MUSEUM
SEPTEMBER 5, 2005 – JANUARY 15, 2006

GABRIEL WARREN



NOTE ON TITLES

Many of my titles are derived from Ancient Greek. I find the language complex and expressive in ways English is not. For example, the suffix “-ics” implies “art”, “science”, and “study of”. There is no word in our tongue that makes this leap, since we have divorced art from science, among many other divorces, in our culture of specialization.


Early naturalists from the Enlightenment forward were always classically trained, since it was a large component of all education at the time. When they were confronted with the new and unfamiliar, they usually fell back upon this archive to name and classify.

Structurally, many Greek words consist of a “base”, with a modifying suffix and prefix added where desired. Because of this, generating new words is relatively straightforward. In the case of “Empurologia”, the base is “pyr”, “pur”: fire, light. The prefix is “en-”, (“em-” since “n” becomes “m” before a “p”): within. The suffix is “-logia”: “the study or science of”. Thus, Empurologia becomes “investigation of internal fire and light”. In a similar manner, a “rhegma” signifies a fracture, so “Rhegmalogia” is simply the study of fractures.

Outside cover:

Empurologia: Relief #11
aluminum, glass. Width 72”

This page: Empurologia:
Relief #11(detail) alumi-
num, glass, height 30”



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Freezing lead in Lancaster
Sound, viewed from Cana-
dian Coast Guard helicopter.

ARTIST STATEMENT



Gabriel Warren and inukshuk,
northern Baffin Island.

Visual art to me is merely another language. As with all tongues, elegance of expression, however intrinsically lovely, is by itself useless: it rises above this only in service to the content being expressed. This might seem self evident, but it is worth mention since so much art fails to acknowledge the simple tenet that content, or meaning is the real objective.

Ice, although far from the only one, is my main source in the natural world for my sculptural investigations. The signals of the anthropogenically generated distress of the biosphere are all about us, but perhaps nowhere as consistent, as dramatic, and with as far and long-reaching implications as those being broadcast from ice. The consequences for the future of humanity of collapse of the ice cover of the Arctic Ocean or the West Antarctic Ice Sheet are dire indeed, and science shows that they can occur in startlingly short time spans. We ignore ice at our peril, but that is largely what we are doing, with the exception of a few scientists.

I consider art and science to be sister disciplines: properly executed, they are both based on the principle of looking very, very closely at the world and somehow making sense of it. An important component of this process is creative inspiration, the sublime production of a 'something' into a previous void. This flash—so exceedingly rare in any lifetime—operates identically in

the cases of both art and science: it is founded on a passionate investment and immersion in one's topic, of course, but also something else: the flexibility of cognition in an exercised and fit human mind. This agility operates identically for the scientist and the artist. Indeed, art and science can not only inform each other, by triangulating on a topic from differing viewpoints, but assist each other by encouraging this creative dynamic.

I attempt to position myself at the intersection of these two fault lines of art v. science on one hand, and humanity v. the natural world on the other. In both cases, I believe the divides are potentially bridgeable, but these bridges represent a challenge for our species.

Ice has implications and components relevant to all of this, and thus has great meaning. It also has the attribute of great beauty. Of course I am only human, and appreciate beauty for its own sake, but to me even this is but a tool, like composition, texture, color, scale, reference and so forth. Simply put, beauty leads to empathy. We care about what we find beautiful, and we protect what we care about.

If these pieces can make some contribution, however small, towards encouraging such empathy-- not just towards ice but all of the biosphere-- then I will deem them successful. ❖

POLAR ILLUMINATIONS



Top: *Empurologia: Relief #10*
height: 22"



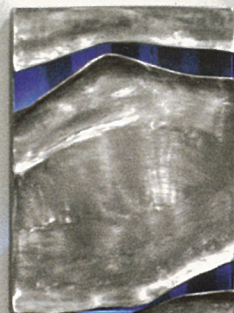
Above: *Serac VII (The Chalice)*
Stainless, bronze, Cor-Ten, height: 8'

Gabriel Warren's art forms are inspired by ice, but he is far removed from the artists who make ice sculptures at First Night celebrations. Warren, the two time recipient of a National Science Foundation grant, studies the science of glaciers, travels to the Arctic and Antarctic and transforms the scientifically precise forms of ice into expressive, angular sculptures of glistening metal. To Warren, glaciers evoke the same reverence and feeling for time passing as the Grand Canyon or a Chinese Scholars rock. Glaciers, ice sheets and shelves, icebergs and floes all bring out the formal sculptor in the artist. From observation to abstraction, Warren seeks to interpret the beauty of the ice in line, shape and texture.

The National Science Foundation did not come easily to abstract sculpture. The usual arts applicants were painters, musicians and photographers, and through Warren's committed efforts, he became the first sculptor sent to Antarctica, in 1999. Warren, who considers himself an environmental artist, fabricates his metal pieces from thin sheets so

as to 'tread lightly on the earth.' Large and small, these works made of aluminum, stainless, bronze and Cor-Ten grace both the landscape and interiors. Warren's sculptures are layered with meanings and references to the condition of the planet, based on his close observation of the way ice behaves. For instance the oversized *Serac VII (The Chalice)*, 1986-97 suggests a glacier grinding against a rock wall. A column breaks off at one end, signifying the 'calving' of a glacier, a short-lived phenomenon. Such images are ripe for metaphors of mortality, destruction of the habitat, global warming and more. Further, Warren gives his series of sculptures titles that play with the intersection of science, art and language: *Sympiesis*, *Piesterion*, *Artifact*, *Rhegmalogia*, and lately *Empurologia*.

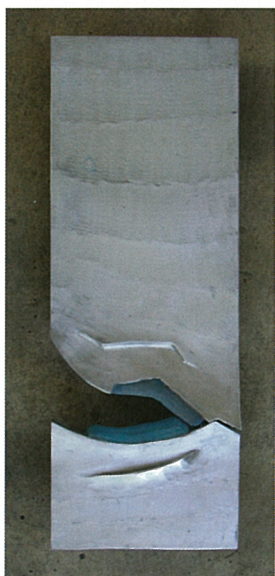
Empurologia, Warren's most recent series, derives from a trip he took to the high Arctic in the fall of 2001. Like the ice there is nothing static about Warren's sculptural processes. Being familiar with the various ways seawater congeals, on this trip he noticed a particularly captivating



pattern of woven ice, caused by shifting currents and winds. He writes, "Day after day I would be presented with a visual banquet of patterns, which I and my cameras absorbed, both from shipboard and from her helicopter. It

beautiful but replete with metaphorical potential as well." Warren's efforts to capture these effects led to his experimentation with tinted, illuminated glass within the metal, complementing the play of light on the surface.

which he thinks is a good thing. Whether looming from the landscape or viewed from a more intimate space, Warren's multi-faceted, luminous constructions beckon us closer to admire and contemplate.



began to dawn on me that the give and take nature of finger rafting was not only stunningly

A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design in 1978, Warren has continued to educate himself about the larger world in order to inform his art. He has built and worked on boats, sails them offshore, and flies an airplane. He is passionate about travel and has spent extended time in New Zealand, Alaska, Scotland and Central America, among other destinations. Not a pessimist, Warren is nevertheless a voice for environmental concern, and makes his sculptures not only from his need to create but also to observe and inform. The result, in Warren's mind is a blend of science and art, something

Nancy Whipple Grinnell, Curator, Newport Art Museum



Top: Empurologia: Relief #7 (tryptych) total width: 32". Private collection.

Above: Terminus of unnamed glacier Croker Bay, Devon Island, viewed from Canadian Coast Guard helicopter.

Left: Empurologia: Relief #12 height: 24"

AN ENTHUSIASM FOR ICE



Mention your enthusiasm for ice, and you'll get a lot of perplexed looks. After all, ice is a tangible reminder of the ordeals our species went through 20,000 or so years during the last Ice Age. This is probably why we complain so much about the winter, huddle indoors, dress like the Michelin Man, and—in extreme cases—go to Florida. Our collective genes tell us that, like Huck Finn, we've been there before.

And yet ice, especially polar ice, can be a source of true wonderment. North of Siberia, I've watched pack-ice change with the changing sunlight from green to rosy pink to a phosphorescent blue. In Greenland, I've seen an armada of icebergs floating in the sea like Chinese pagodas, Roman amphitheatres, Boeing aircraft hangars, and alpine peaks. In this same flotilla, the Cathedral of Chartres was sitting cheek by jowl with, it would appear, the Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota.

Such indeterminacy is the prerogative not of kings but of the natural processes that turn kings to dust.

Gabriel Warren's sculptures could not have been created without an intimate experience of polar ice, not to mention a passion for its myriad guises. To view these sculptures is to be transported to the polar regions yourself. Here's a zone of conflict that looks as if it might buckle into an ice ridge at any moment. Here's a jagged crevasse that seems eminently capable of swallowing the unwary. Here's an ice-pan shimmering in the high latitude light. And if you think that metal, an industrial substance, cannot register the non-industrial world, think again. For here's the vertical seam of an ice wedge that wouldn't be out of place on the coast of Greenland.

If natural processes turn kings and other mortals to dust, unnatural processes are currently turning ice to water. In the future, the

only way to visit New York, Los Angeles, or Tokyo might be in a bathysphere. Where, our descendants might ask, is the ice of yesteryear? And what, they might also ask, was that ice of yesteryear? They would be able to find out by looking at Gabriel Warren's remarkable sculptures...

Lawrence Millman, author of *Lost Places, Lost in the Arctic: Explorations on the Edge, and others*.



Top: Tabular iceberg, McMurdo Sound, Antarctica. Calved from Ross Ice Shelf. Height from waterline about 200', total 1600'.

Above: Terminus (front) of Ross Ice Shelf, seen from U.S. Coast Guard helicopter.



Piesterion: Column #6
(detail) Stainless, height: 12'